

## **Congresswoman Betty McCollum**

*Serving Minnesota's 4th Congressional District*

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On September 27, 2009, Congresswoman McCollum addressed over 120 institutions during the opening ceremony for the annual joint conference of the Association of Midwest Museums and the Minnesota Association of Museums in St. Paul, Minnesota. She told the crowd of 500 participants that non-profits like museums, including universities, libraries, provide the essential fabric that connects America's communities and fuels the nation's economy.

**The following is the text of her prepared remarks:**

**September 27, 2009**

## **Speech to Association of Midwest Museums (AMM)**

### **Minnesota Science Museum**

Good evening.

Welcome to Minnesota and our Capital City – St. Paul. It is an honor to be with you tonight.

Let me start by thanking Eric Jolly, Executive Director of the Minnesota Science Museum, for the kind introduction and for hosting this gathering at the Science Museum. This institution is a treasure for our state – a wonderful place of exploration, learning, and fun.

Since all politics is local, let me acknowledge and thank the President of the Association of Midwest Museums – Minnesota's own Madam President – Lin Nelson-Mayson for her leadership and for bringing this conference to the Twin Cities. As you all know, Lin is the Director of the Goldstein Museum of Design at the University of Minnesota which is in my congressional district.

Thank you, Lin, for all your work.

Finally, I would like to congratulate your conference co-chairs – Nina Archabal, Director of the Minnesota Historical Society, and Kaywin Feldman, Director and President of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. Nina is a Minnesota legend for her tremendous work over decades and Kaywin is leading one of the most impressive and important art institutions in the country.

Thank you both for your work.

To all of you from Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Missouri, and across Minnesota – thank you for being here.

And most of all, thank you for the work you are doing. It is important work.

It is work that is vital to the cultural, civic, and educational fabric of our communities and our collective society.

As a member of Congress, I am so proud to represent a district and state that has such a rich tradition of valuing, sustaining, and investing in museums, the arts, science, and citizen engagement with institutions that promote knowledge and learning.

The Twin Cities have an extraordinary abundance of excellent museums – large and small. In my own congressional district we have fantastic institutions such as the Science Museum, the Minnesota Children's Museum, the Minnesota Historical Center, the Como Park Zoo and Conservatory, the Dakota County Historical Society, the Goldstein Museum of Design, Landmark Center, the Minnesota Museum of American Art, and the Ramsey House.

Of course, St. Paul's twin – Minneapolis – also has terrific museums that Minnesotans and visitors from around the world enjoy.

Minnesota's wealth of museums is in large part because it is so cold here and because we recognize that they enhance our state's quality of life, they inspire a culture knowledge seeking, and they contribute to our economy.

As the stewards of our cultural heritage, promoters of ideas, and facilitator of engagement with the environment and our place in it, our museums are alive with energy and excitement that allow citizens of all ages to explore, discover, and make sense of the world – past, present and future.

I remember as a young girl, each year I would look forward to the possibility of being one of the lucky students in my grade school to win a ticket to go to the old Science Museum in downtown St. Paul.

Even though I never became a scientist, I credit the Science Museum for sparking my curiosity in science, which has influenced me through out my career in public office from work on the environment to global health.

And those early experiences also influenced me when I later served as a member of the Minnesota Legislature in other ways as well.

In the mid-1990's, when the Science Museum was looking for state funding to build this beautiful facility, I didn't need to be lobbied, I was already a stakeholder who knew the value and importance of this institution's work. Together we built a treasure on the Mississippi River.

This building, the programming, and the people who make science come alive for kids and our community is all here because of partnerships.

Minnesota has great museums because we have chosen to invest in museums.

This has been done through partnerships between patrons, benefactors, business, and government at the local, state, and federal levels – everyone coming together to build a better future.

For all of you here to continue your respective missions and sustain the terrific work you are doing – we need to continue the partnership.

From my point of view, I want Congress and the federal government to be more of a partner in the work you are doing.

Some may criticize the federal government's role in funding the institutions you represent – I think they are wrong.

I want the federal government to be a strong partner and investor in the arts, in the humanities, in the sciences, in education, in making the world we live in understandable – from the stars to the smallest cells dividing in our bodies. Exposure to knowledge, ideas, and the wonders of our world should not be a luxury only for the privileged; it needs be accessible to everyone in our communities.

As a member of the House Appropriations Committee my work is to set priorities when investing hundreds of billions your tax dollars to keep our country secure, promote the well-being of our citizens, and ensure our nation's interests are protected and advance.

Your institutions and your programming are part of the national interest. Your work is part of ensuring an educated citizenry that is essential to our nation's well-being. That means we need to make investments.

For fiscal year 2010 that will start next month, the U.S. House approved \$170 million for the National Endowment for the Arts and \$170 million for the National Endowment for the Humanities.

I also was pleased that in the stimulus bill the House included \$50 million the NEA that will help save jobs in our nation's non-profit arts sector.

The Labor, Health and Human Services, Education Appropriations Sub-committee which I am a member approved \$276 million for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) for next year. This is disappointing since it essentially reflects flat funding from 2009 and it means we have work to do.

I know IMLS does great work. Last month my office co-hosted a grant workshop with IMLS

here in St. Paul at the Children's Museum. It was a great event with over 200 people attending to learn to better navigate and understand the IMLS grant process. I was impressed by IMLS's outreach and wish every federal agency was this accessible.

Since IMLS is the primary federal support for our nation's museums and libraries it would be my hope to that AMM and the Minnesota Association of Museums, along with your national organizations and your colleagues in the library community, would really work to put together a congressional advocacy plan to push funding for IMLS, NEA and NEH to a level that begins to meet the needs of the your institutions and the communities you serve.

This is not to supplant your private funding or other local and state funding you may receive, but Washington can do better.

But to do better, your role is critical. We need you to arm with information those members who are your champions. We need you to inform, educate and persuade those Members of Congress who are undecided or opposed to funding increases.

You need to turn your organizations' board members, donors, and patrons into citizen lobbyists advocating for an investment that "stimulates knowledge" and community building – which is what you do.

Congress needs to know what you want, what you need, and how federal dollars are going to make a difference in the lives of kids, families and seniors.

Let me finish my comments. As we all know, this is an exciting and yet very challenging time in Washington and in every one of our communities.

People are stressed and they are worried. They are concerned about their job, their ability to afford and access health care, and about the future of our country. Resources are scare and this recession is taking serious toll on everyone – including your organizations.

I believe the federal government has an essential role in partnering with and supporting a vibrant and vital non-profit sector across our country. This includes museums as well as universities, libraries, the arts, and community health and human service organizations – the non-profit sector.

This sector is a vital part of our economy.

Yours are the organizations that provide important services, provide jobs, nurture our youth, and teach our citizens. Non-profits provide the essential fabric that connects our communities.

The non-profit community needs to be organized, focused, and strategic. I want to hear the voices of the leaders of museum community, but I also want to hear your voices as part of the larger policy discussions on health care, education, energy, economic recovery, and building strong, sustainable communities.

The agenda that you care about, that I care about, needs to be put in front of policy makers at the local, state and federal levels.

Your success is a direct reflection on the success of our communities and the families who live in them. America needs your organizations to continue to be successful and sustainable.

Thank you for being here tonight and inviting me to speak.

Hopefully the next time I see you will be in Washington advocating and educating for the value, vision, and extraordinary contributions you make to our communities and our nation.

Please count me as one of your advocates.

Thank you and enjoy the conference.